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TO

A MOTHER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'HELEN AND MARIA,'
'ELLEN,' &c.



BOSTON,
LEONARD C. BOWLES.
1831.

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LETTERS

TO

A M O T H E R.

LETTER I.

You speak of the faults of your son, with a sincerity and earnestness that excite in me a strong desire to do what I can to assist you in discovering their source ; knowing how deeply you feel the responsibility of his education, and your willingness to make any exertions for his real good ; I shall, with the same earnestness in the cause, make no hesitation in expressing freely what seem to me some of the evils of his education, in common with other children.

I agree with you, that his faults are those of manner ; but in using this expression, *manner*, I attach perhaps more meaning to it than you do. It is very common to hear mothers say, he is really a good child, but his manners are shock-

ing, terrible, and the like expressions, thinking by this they show their willingness to view their children's faults impartially ; but is it not, after all, merely the plea of tenderness toward what is really wrong in their children, and what in their secret hearts they fear to be the truth ?

It must be remembered that children's manners are the fair and simple display of their feelings and views in all their truth. They do not, like grown people, have manners which do not correspond with their real characters, unless their education has been for this purpose. You have not fallen into this great error, that of teaching your child to appear what he is not. Some mothers, with an unaccountable thoughtlessness, will sacrifice their child's integrity to gratify the vain desire of having him appear well before others ; thus, early planting in him the seeds of hypocrisy and a low ambition. But to return to the first subject, faults of manner in children. You may say, how are parents to guard against this evil, unless by giving them some direct instruction upon the subject ? If what I have said with regard to children's manners be true, it is worse than labor lost to be-

stow any pains upon them, unless in matters of mere form, which any child can learn with little trouble to himself or his parents.

A child's fault of manner, then, must arise from some fault in his feelings, or views of things; and these he must have obtained in his intercourse with those around him. To make myself better understood, I will mention one instance of fault of manner in a child. Suppose him, when at the table, to comment very minutely on the food, inquiring whether it is of such and such a quality, how it is cooked, or numerous other questions, that the subject in its various relations may admit of. This would be thought want of good manners in the child, and blamed accordingly. But why should it be? when, if he were to ask about the growth of any of the productions before him and show a desire to learn something of their history, he would be applauded. The reason he asks the former questions instead of the latter is, that his mind has been interested in the former subject by the interest he has seen others feel in it; and he has been led by this to think it of great importance. Here, then, is one ground for fault of

manner, as it is called ; and should be traced to the parents, and be cured in the child by being first cured in them. When a child makes such an innocent mistake as this, should not its parents think whether they have not inadvertently led him into it by injudicious conversation ; and remember that what would be bad manners in them is in their child the natural result of a curiosity, that they have themselves excited? Should they not be rather pleased than offended, that he can so easily be interested ; and blame themselves that they have not given him better subjects in which to interest his inquiring mind ? It appears to me that parents too often forget that they are surrounded by listening ears, catching all their words as so many oracles, that are to enlighten their ignorance and make them acquainted with the mysteries of life. They, too, forget that they are in the midst of impartial witnesses, who keep faithful records of all they see and hear. In this view, children are our best teachers, our only honest friends ; in this way, if in no other, they may prove to be our greatest blessings.

To be a parent, must be the beginning of a true acquaintance with ourselves, and conse-

quently of a new education ; and if in this we are willing to become as little children, we may then hope to lead them into the kingdom of heaven.

It appears to me that if a mother stands upon this ground, her anxious heart may find rest in the hope of final success, and that so placed, her only desire should be to discover *what are the obstacles* in the way of her child's progress, and then to bend all her efforts towards removing them. When a child first attempts to walk, we make the path plain before him, and present some alluring object in the distance which we think he can gain. Every child may move his feet in a different way, but all will press forward if there is no barrier between them and the desired good. This is equally true of their mental faculties ; and parents should not be disheartened or discouraged if they frequently fail in the attempt, but remember that with every effort they gain new strength. Let them not despond if their progress is slow ; they are in the right path, and the prize is before them.

This subject presents so many interesting

views, and awakens so much thought, that what little I have said does it no justice, but it may be of some aid to your own reflections ; and if you are not weary with my attempts to serve you, I should like, in another letter, to enlarge upon what I have only hinted at in this.

LETTER II.

I willingly comply with your request to express upon the subject of education any further views that may be suggested to me from that great school of education, human life. We naturally look to those who have gone before us to point out the most direct road to the eminence all are seeking for, and those who have toiled through mistaken paths find rest to their wearied spirit in the attempt to lessen the labors of those who come after them.

The field of education has been so universally explored that it would long since have been deserted, were it not so universally acknowledged to be the only ground upon which we may safely hope to build the happiness of our children, and at the same time correct our own mistakes. With this view its resources will never be exhausted ; while there is a heaven beyond its horizon, there will still be left something to do, some further progress to be made.

Parents and teachers are often disheartened

at the little progress their children make in those subjects where they perhaps have given them the most instruction, while again they are encouraged and delighted at the intelligence and observation they evince where little or no assistance has been rendered. The only way we can account for this fact is, that not having yet learned what are the operations of a child's mind, we cannot calculate upon its results. We undertake to instruct and enlighten a mind, of whose exquisite machinery we know very little, and when we attempt to set the wheels in motion, the result too often proves that instead of forwarding the great work that was going on, we have only interrupted it.

This ignorance then is one great difficulty in education, and though the evil arising from it cannot always be prevented, may it not be lessened by a more attentive observation and study of the peculiar construction of the different minds we are dealing with? In forming the characters of our children, is not our solicitude so great upon the subject, that we take the work too much into our own hands, and think by following certain methods we must arrive at certain ends. But the chance is generally

against us, and we fail, not from want of exertion, but from ignorance. This ignorance cannot be removed by our knowledge upon other subjects ; no learned disquisition can throw so much light upon the mind we would unfold, as that mind itself. Let our instructors then be the very children themselves ; if we will but practise the same humility we recommend, we may in our intercourse with them learn something of the precious mine they possess ; let us wait for them to show us where we are to bend our strength, at what entrance we are to descend for the precious ore ; they will then, with all the truth and inquisitiveness of childhood, work with us ; and thus accompanied, our labors will prove effectual.

Because children are ignorant of the external world, and because we have from the first moment of their existence watched almost every pulsation of their being, and guided their tottering steps, we are apt to become unconscious that there is hidden in this frail being, that, which shall at a future day raise him far above the guidance of any human aid. With this conviction we should approach children, to learn of them how we can best minister to their

spiritual wants, and remember, that our acquisitions do not make us really superior to them, in the only glory man can claim, the possession of a mind capable of continual improvement and happiness.

In teaching children, we are too apt to be anxious that they should show the insignia of a good education by knowing certain facts, and that they should as fast as possible grow up to the standard scale of knowledge ; but success in this course may be more gratifying to the parent than the child ; when he has gained the desired goal, he may feel a void in his heart its honors cannot fill. While to the superficial observer he may appear thoroughly educated, he is still profoundly ignorant of the only subject worthy of study, the enlargement and happiness of his own mind. He is to be sure educated, but it is for others, not for himself ; he is still a stranger in a strange land, not having yet turned to his own mind to find in what path he is best suited to walk, he has blindly followed that of others, and never felt the inexpressible joy of being at home. Is it not true that each mind has its own peculiar element, as really as the birds and the fishes have

their element? But children are rarely so educated as to learn this great truth; their teachers keep them blind to it by their mode of instruction. Children, who feel themselves dependent upon others for their very existence and rely for all their comfort and happiness on the will of others, yield up their spiritual nature with the same confidence as their physical, but as they cannot give away the inalienable right, we should feel bound as soon as possible to acquaint them with the birthright which in their ignorance they slight, and let them see and feel that with all our authority we have no power over it equal to their own.

Parents should feel it as much their duty to inform children of what they really possess in this way, as they would to undeceive the poor mendicant who should offer a diamond in place of a piece of glass, as his only return for the morsel of bread they had bestowed. If we accept what is so ignorantly given we should hold ourselves responsible for the consequences; but what would this avail? We cannot alleviate the discontent and misery arising from the neglect of the lawful owner, who, when it is too late, will claim his own, that he may receive

from it those fruits of the spirit that nothing else he has sought for will yield.

The power of habit and authority which attends children from their first entrance into this world, is apt to hide from them their own capacities, and prevent them in the mature years of reflection from feeling the full force of their spiritual nature; and when they are in the midst of trial, they become doubters of an existence of which they have learned so little from experience. Devoted parents stand ready at any moment to sacrifice themselves for their children, and with this feeling they seem to think that the goodness and happiness of their children are to be wrought out only by their own anxious exertions, their own daily privations. Such a spirit of martyrdom will go up as a memorial before God, and the children who have excited it no doubt catch something from the spiritual flame. No one could wish to lessen such energy, such love; but it should be differently directed. Let mothers, who would do all this to gain for their children certain situations in life, remember that it is more important that each child should arrive at that one, where he can best use the powers God

has given him. A conscientious use of the powers we possess, let them be ever so limited, is the ladder in the desert, upon which the angels of God will descend and ascend till they shall find us ready to accompany them to their heavenly home. If we have awakened a child to the consciousness of his own being, we have given him already the best teachers and opened upon him a scene where his noblest ambition may be gratified; it is in his own breast too, that father, mother, and guardian may all be found, and it is here we may see the divine likeness in which he was made.

LETTER III.

You ask me for more particular and practical views upon the subject of education, for some directions that may guide you through the untried scene, in which you hope to find the path that will lead your son to his true home. Placed as his guide, you wish to gain all the helps that may save him from unnecessary trials, and secure his final success. In this anxiety you show your sense of the greatness of the task assigned you, and I have willingly enlisted myself in the cause with a sincere desire to give you assistance, and a willingness to express my feelings upon the subject, as they rise in my mind ; if you can gather any good from them I shall indeed be happy.

There is one thing that appears to me important for us to bear in mind in the outset, which is, that we should endeavor in all our anxiety upon this subject to keep in view the fact that this great work is not to be done all at once, and that too much solicitude prevents the free action of the mind and warps the judg-

ment. We should strive to fasten our attention upon essentials, and remember that our interest and devotion to particulars are important only as they serve the great end. It appears to me that the first step to be taken, should be to firmly establish in our minds the principle upon which we are to act, and by keeping this constantly in view, learn by observation and experience in what way we shall use our means so that they may bear upon the accomplishment of the chief design. But we must not look forward with a too anxious impatience for results, or we may at last undervalue the means by which such results are brought about. We should remember, that as the noblest works of art in the outward world are composed of the simplest materials, so we may hope to meet with success in still nobler works in the moral world by faithfully using the means placed in our hands by Him who has assigned us our tasks. In education, these means differ in the hands of every parent and with every child, which makes it impossible to give directions concerning their use. While we acknowledge this, there is still something to be gained from the experience of others ; there are some in-

dividuals who have watched with more discrimination than others the workings of the human mind; and from such, some important truths may be gained, and our own imperfect views be made perhaps more definite, and consequently more useful. But while we feel the difficulty of saying how we shall educate our children so as to promote their best good, might we not ask ourselves what we do to retard it, and how we will *not* educate them.

It may seem unnecessary to say that children should not be educated in such a manner as to become selfish and vain, and yet I believe they are continually so educated. That it is not the deliberate purpose of their parents to produce these effects is no proof that it is not done. Would there not be much trouble, much anxiety, and indeed much heart-breaking saved, were parents to be determined how they would not educate their children, rather than how they would? In such a determination there is no presumption, and may be much safety, and I believe success. I think I hardly know of an instance where a fault has been particularly disgusting to a parent, that they have not contrived some means by which to prevent their

child from possessing it. It seems to me a plain fact that children are educated to be selfish, vain and hypocritical, because all these faults may take such a form in the child and in the parent as to give no fearful warning of their dreadful tendency ; and such education is given too by parents who feel as if they would give their heart's blood to make their children inheritors of the virtues which are to admit them to the kingdom of heaven.

That a child is educated to the first of these faults seems almost a necessary consequence of the relation itself. The first devoted feeling of the mother when this immortal being is committed to her charge, when in giving it the nourishment that is a part of her life she feels the willingness to sacrifice all for the precious life that is deposited with her, is one, so vital and holy that it takes fast hold of her very existence, and accompanies her every thought of the important trust which depends upon her love and disinterestedness for its comfort and well being. But it is this very feeling which unconsciously leads a mother into the mistake of educating her child to be the selfish receiver of her generous love. Seeing and feeling, as he

does, with every moment of his existence, that his wants, his pleasures, his welfare, are the chief objects of thought and attention with those around him, how is it possible that he should help viewing himself in the light in which he is thus placed, and learn to attach at least as much importance to whatever administers to his good as they do who confer the benefits?

It may be said, how is this to be avoided? Is it not right and proper that a mother should be thus devoted, and if so, how can a child avoid knowing that he is the object of so much solicitude? I would not have the child ignorant of this truth. It is the first step in leading him to the knowledge of that all protecting power, whose love encircles us from the first moment of our existence, and is never withheld. But while the child is experiencing the safety and happiness of this protection, he should also be taught how he is to earn so great a privilege, and learn for himself what are its enjoyments and how he may insure their continuance when his tender years no longer call for such devotion.

If the love of parents was more thoroughly disinterested, they would never gratify it at the

possible expense of their child's good. Neither indifference nor severity is necessary to prevent parents from making their children such objects of their tenderness and love as to foster within them a selfish habit of mind. However difficult it may be, it surely is not impracticable to maintain towards them a conscientious love which shall not be indulged at the sacrifice of their good, and while it is important that their lives should be made happy by having their innocent tastes gratified, their reasonable demands answered, they need not be led to think that this is the only object and end of their being ; and without any metaphysical lectures upon the subject, we can let them know that we are equally anxious to answer the demands of higher wants. We should let them see that we are solicitous for them to deny one part of their nature that they may feed the other ; that while we do all we can to alleviate their pain of body we at the same time administer to their minds, that they may learn to bear a present evil for the sake of a future good. In teaching them to submit to bodily inconveniences they may learn that their minds need never be put to inconvenience. It is doubtless a great effort for a pa-

rent to deny his child a present gratification for a future good of which the child can form no idea ; the present is to him his world of happiness, and for a parent to destroy this little world requires the spirit of self-sacrifice, and is too painful to be endured but by those to whom the future is as real as the present. It may be thought extravagant, but my experience and observation lead me to say that the effort of denying a child what may seem to him a reasonable pleasure is one of the greatest that can be made ; it is the plucking out the right eye, and on this account parents so often find excuses for not doing it when their reason and conscience tell them they should. This self-denial in parents is necessary as well for their own as their children's good. Children know when we indulge them on this weak ground, and they take the lesson to heart and soon learn to profit by it. Our own selfishness has much to do with the selfishness of our children. There is no fault which is perhaps so easily inculcated and followed.

There are innumerable instances when the direct tendency of our conduct toward children is to make them selfish. Without enumerating

instances, I would ask if parents are not continually watching to see in what way they can minister to the personal gratification of their children, and with unnecessary assiduity awakening their attention to what would otherwise be insignificant. To mention one example, that of their meals; as everything is important to children, the mere gratification of their hunger may be made to become a source of great evil; a broad way may be opened to selfishness on this harmless ground. 'These little things are great to little men,' and should so be considered by those who have anything to do with them. A child's meals may be so conducted as to be a complete stumbling block in the way of his improvement, and thus an education commenced which shall lead him backward instead of forward. If his imagination is excited upon the subject by the manner in which it is spoken of, his curiosity awakened and his feelings interested, so that his happiness is involved, he has taken one effectual lesson to teach him to look to such sources for the promotion of his happiness. If his natural desire for happiness is gratified through such a channel, what is to tell him that it is one that will destroy rather than

increase what he is seeking for? how is it to be expected that he is to discriminate between the tendency of such pleasures and those of a different nature, where his unlimited spiritual wants may be equally gratified, and the foundation laid for a happiness that nothing can destroy? How cruel to lead him to broken cisterns, when he has within him a spring of living water which will never fail.

It may be said that the pleasures of eating and drinking are so real with children that it is cruel to do anything which shall lessen the happiness they derive from them. The happiness that nature intended they should derive from such sources I would not be so presumptuous as to prevent. But this is not what is condemned. I am far from recommending that the innocent pleasures of children should be cut off; for they are the healthful sunshine of their souls; but I would not have mere selfish pleasures enhanced by the manner in which we offer them to children. We can in these things discriminate for them without using any unkind authority. What has been said with regard to children's meals may also apply to administering to their other wants which are merely sel-

fish. When, for instance, a child is suffering from cold, I would not enlarge upon the subject and lead him to think he is the only individual in the world who suffers. How easy, on the contrary, would it be to excite his lively imagination for others, and make his heart warm even when his fingers were numb. Let him share his warm seat with a brother or sister who, younger than himself, need his sympathy for their suffering.

The few instances to which I have alluded may show what I mean when I say children are often educated to faults which they might have otherwise escaped. If there is any truth in the assertion, I know you will be glad to have it presented. But this letter must have an end, though my speculations upon the subject of education are still abroad in the hope of gathering something that may be of some use, or at least do no harm, to those who enjoy the sober reality of trying by practice what is the best theory.

LETTER IV.

You say the view I have given you of the relation between parent and child as liable to so much evil, is one of discouragement, and takes from the charm and satisfaction of such a connexion. In this remark you forget that I turned away from its joys and satisfactions that I might discover and point out those unseen evils that approach with their poison to destroy this pure enjoyment. It is because I think so much of this relation, of its great satisfaction and joy, that I would be vigilant to discover what may overthrow it. It is surely unnecessary when addressing a mother to enlarge upon the source of happiness she has in the possession of an immortal soul, of a spark of intelligence from the eternal mind. The heaven-born smile of the infant as it looks in its mother's face seems to open upon her anew the conviction of this truth, giving her an assurance that its destiny cannot be bound to this earth; and with this assurance all pain and suffering and anxiety are swallowed up in the great thought that she is to minister

of all that she has to this immortal spirit given her by the Father of all spirits. Let no one feel discouragement while such a relation exists, and let them remember that no efforts are lost when made in such a cause, if made with a true desire for the best good. Suppose the worst, that disappointment instead of success should attend untiring effort, and that this being so precious should grow up to bring sorrow to the heart that would have sacrificed all for its sake, can we suppose that such a being is neglected or forgotten by Him who gave it? Perhaps other scenes await it where our efforts shall meet with their reward, where the seeds we have sown with aching hearts and anxious tears shall finally spring up to bless us in a purer region. Whatever view we take of the subject it should not be one of discouragement. We must continually bear in mind that we see but a part of the great plan, and that what is dark and mysterious in our view would, if we could see the whole, prove but the cloud filled with refreshing showers. We must take courage and be prepared for any present evil, when we know what is our destiny. We too often put out of sight for what we are living—for what

we are tried, for what we suffer. Let us then look truth in the face ; she is to be our companion to the world of celestial light, and from her we can gain nothing but good. With this conviction then, I fear not to go on to mention other evils which may arise from the sacred connexion of parent and child.

In my last letter I spoke of educating children to be selfish, vain, and hypocritical, and my belief that such education was often given by good parents ; and I endeavored to show how they fall into the first error. The second is one of fewer temptations and consequently not so often committed, though in this I may be mistaken ; but it is of little importance which of these sad effects the most prevail in fault of a proper education. Vanity appears to me a fault which children are not likely to fall into of themselves ; they are so surrounded by objects to excite their love and admiration as to have no leisure or disposition to contemplate with complacency their limited knowledge of the world of wonders in which they are placed ; but we continually see that they are made vain. Parents may very innocently lead their children into this fault from the very earnestness to do

all they can to bring forward the powers which are committed to their charge. The complacency a mother feels in her child, in its daily progress, in its beautiful putting forth, is a temptation to her to forget that these indications of the invisible world within, which at a future day are to depend for their health and vigor upon the child himself, may by too much observation, too much care, be cultivated at the expense of their sound growth, that the soil from which they spring may be exhausted in giving nourishment to the shoots that rapidly come forth in the sunshine of a mother's love and pride. It is a hard task for a mother so to discipline herself as to be able to enjoy with soberness the unspeakable satisfaction of her child's intelligence, of his endearing, winning ways: her heart must indeed 'be fixed,' or it will be taken captive by the thousand nameless graces that make up the sum of a child's existence. In children the partition between the visible and the invisible is so transparent that we seem to see the spirit itself sending its light and joy through every fibre of the frame. But while we live with them in this pure region we must not forget how soon the way is to be

obscured by the temptations that are around them and through which they must struggle. It is then incumbent on us not to increase these temptations or weaken in our children the power which is given them for dominion over them.

One way in which children are educated to be vain is by parents allowing themselves to speak of their attainments or qualities before them, and in a manner which must lead the child to think that he has accomplished something extraordinary, something which deserves and demands attention from others, and they are consequently led to think that this is the object of their acquirements and that their value is in proportion to the estimation in which they are held by others. They are thus led to love the applause of the thing rather than the thing itself—and here is the difficulty. Their progress is so wonderful and so gratifying that it is hard for us to show the pleasure it excites in us in a manner which shall rather stimulate the child to future exertions than satisfy him with what he has already gained. It is no doubt important that children should be encouraged to effort by the approbation of those they love and to whom they look for their happiness and

wellbeing. But it is not approbation of which I disapprove, but the noticing their acquirements, making them conspicuous, and forcing the child's mind, which would otherwise be free, to dwell upon his limited attainments, and thus bending his powers of observation upon what he has accomplished rather than leaving them to their natural propensity of pressing on to something else, and using what he has gained, to gain more, and for this purpose only. A child may very easily be taught to view the little circle of facts in which he has been instructed as the boundary of all knowledge, and in this dominion where he is lord and master feel a complacency and self-satisfaction which are fearful indications that he has tasted a sweet poison that may check the free and healthful action of his powers, and which can bring satisfaction to himself or others only in proportion as they are continually extending to the unlimited sphere for which they were given him.

How many are the instances where vanity is inculcated in children by the thoughtlessness of those who have the *management* of them—a word which is too descriptive of our intercourse

with children. What will such or such a one think of you, if you do not do so or so, is often said to children by way of bringing them into order, and they are thus managed by pulling the string of vanity. It does not to be sure always answer the purpose, for there are some children who have a native independence of mind that secures them against such attacks; some will not be shown off and played upon by such tricks; there seems to be in them a native modesty that holds them in safe keeping through all such trials; and the stupid boy, as he is called, who will not be brought forward to public gaze often proves to be a deep thinker and wise actor, when he is called upon to play his part on the stage of life.

But it is unnecessary to dwell upon the evils of vanity; they are too apparent to require comment; but they are not necessary evils. At all events parents are bound not to insure them by their inconsiderate conduct; and it appears to me that with a sober view of their children as beings who are committed to their charge to be fitted for a higher sphere, to fulfil greater designs than can be performed in this

world, they will neither feel themselves nor lead their children to feel vain of the rudiments which at best are but imperfectly learned by the wisest in this lower school. A child cannot too early be impressed with a feeling of high ambition that shall shut the door upon the narrow world of vanity. There is nothing easier to teach, and it appears to me nothing easier to prevent than vanity, provided it has not become the atmosphere in which the mind has been brought up. In this case the whole system must undergo a change and be thoroughly converted, or no cure can be affected. Let not parents then allow their children to breathe such an atmosphere where nothing will grow or flourish but in the sunshine of a day.

We hear vanity often spoken of as an amiable weakness, and sometimes as a blessing to the possessor; but I know not upon what ground, if we take into view the improvement of character as essential to our true happiness and lasting good. For my own part, when I see vanity springing up in a child's mind, I feel as I should, were I to know that the beautiful lineaments of his frame were suddenly stunted in their growth,

and that he was never to arrive at the perfect stature of man. The excitement of vanity has this effect upon the mind, keeping it from reaching the perfect stature which is to bring it to the likeness of Him who formed it.

LETTER V.

As you say you are not wearied with my comments upon the subject of education, and have some curiosity to see how I can make good my assertion with regard to the evils to which children are educated, I will go on to say how I think they are by education made hypocrites.

It is unnecessary for me to repeat that I do not mean children are intentionally so educated by their parents. I believe there is no parent, may his life have been ever so faulty, who does not wish the best good for his child. The most abandoned seem to take a pleasure in returning to their own days of innocence through the pure medium of their children ; in watching the innocent ways of these heirs of heaven they return, in thought at least, to the pure fountains they themselves have left, and in their sympathy with them catch glimpses of that purer region, once their own happy home, from which they turned in the vain search for some good of their own creating.

The anxiety parents have that their children should feel, and act, and appear all they would wish them, leads them to look for, and expect with too much impatience, the desired good before there is time for its free and natural growth. This feeling is unconsciously imparted to their children, and they, to please their parents, will often try to appear, not as they are, but as they see it is hoped and expected they will be. No doubt much good is to be drawn from this feeling ; but if we make a too great use of it, we shall foster and encourage in the child a habit of mind that does not favor that strict integrity which will prevent anything like hypocrisy. If a child is led to express a feeling or opinion that is not truly his own, but rather one that he thinks will be expected of him and for which he shall be applauded, he has been led to take the first step in the cowardly path of hypocrisy. How many are the instances in which a direct lesson of hypocrisy is taught to children ! To cite what may seem a trifling example ; that for instance of asking a child if he is not glad to see such or such a person, in a tone of voice and manner that to a timid spirit shall be as a command that he must so feel.

The consequence of this is that the child denies his real feeling in his anxiety to appear not as he is but what is expected of him, and in order to get over the difficulty he makes a compromise between truth and his desire to please his parents. In this way his self-respect is lessened, for no authority can speak so loudly to a child as the voice within coming from the throne of truth. He has discovered that he can turn a deaf ear to this voice which he should learn to venerate. From such a beginning, however trivial it may be thought, something is done toward making him a hypocrite, though unconsciously to himself; and when the spark of vanity is excited in him the work is almost certain. In forming a child's manners, which I spoke of in my first letter, it is easy to see how a parent may fall into this error, so entirely opposed to that real dignity which marks a character of truth.

I will mention another instance. When a child does not show sufficient sorrow for the sickness or pain of others, especially for those of his own age, how common is it to maintain toward him a tone and air of reproof, or even to use open censure. Let any one ask what

effect such a course of conduct would be the most likely to produce upon a child's mind. If he was not sorry, would he be made so, by seeing that it was expected he should be? He might to be sure the next time he was placed in a similar situation, make the attempt to appear so in order to escape the disapprobation of those he loved, and with such a motive the child might possibly succeed; but would this success be of any lasting benefit to his character? Would it excite a disinterested sympathy, which is the ground-work of active benevolence? Would it be likely to make him forget himself? Would it not rather lead him to think of what was expected of him on such occasions and how he was to appear when others suffered, and tend rather to increase, than lessen his coldness of heart?

We are not patient enough with children, or we should, while we marked in them such supposed deficiencies, remember there may be something in their minds to account for this apparent want. It is not perhaps the time when this sympathy is to show itself; other feelings may have grown too rapidly for its present advancement; and time only is wanting to bring

it forth. It certainly is more desirable that a child should not feel at all, than appear to feel what he does not. Of what use to himself or others is this pretended character? Will it stand him in stead in the day of temptation? Will it not on the contrary tend to keep him from ever rising to that state where he must *appear* as he *is*. It seems to me that anything is better than accustoming a child to wear a mask, let it be on ever so trifling an occasion; he had better not know that such tricks can be played. The features which God has given him, let them be ever so forbidding to our sight, have in them a power which cannot be imparted to any disguise. While a child may be taught self-control and the power to be what he has the power to feel, he need not be taught to *assume* what is not his own; for sooner or later he must relinquish his right to it. Every mother should try to discover of what her child is capable, and remember that he has come from the hands of his Creator, and has that within him which is capable of bearing him back to the kingdom of spirits. Let her study the sublime work, and catch, if she can, something of the noble plan of his existence, and bend all her efforts in cooperating with the di-

vine will in the purposes of his being, and not destroy or mar the beautiful proportions which she may not at first feel and understand.

There is a want of truth in our intercourse with children, a strange forgetfulness of the simplicity with which they approach every subject. It is sad enough that in our intercourse with adults we gradually learn to compromise the truth and mutually agree to deceive and be deceived. But at least when we deal with children these sad conventions should be laid aside, for it is sacrilege not to meet them on the holy ground of truth upon which they stand.

We must not forget that it is incumbent on us not to pollute the pure springs in which they abound. It is so easy to lead them astray, and how thoughtlessly we undertake to lead them, not knowing whither, so long as we make them go, and are as we hope and think doing something to help them onward! The many mistakes we lead them into arise no doubt from the limited knowledge of the mysterious minds we are dealing with, and on this ground we must cherish the hope that a high purpose for their good will prove a teacher that will not lead them far astray. But much it appears to me may be done in

avoiding evil, and especially the evils of which I have spoken.

We must bear in mind that in order to serve our children the first step is to thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the elements in their minds, and not undertake to make them such or such men and women till we know what kind of children they are. If we do not get this knowledge we may engraft upon their susceptible minds a character that does not at all assimilate with the real ground-work upon which we should bend our efforts, and after years of toil, our labors may prove in vain. This may account for the frequent disappointment of parents who find when their children are freed from the restraint of their authority that they present a character widely different from what they expected. If a factitious character has been given to a child by means of his education, it will gradually wear off and leave him in a worse condition than if nothing had been done for him. Should he possess a native strength of mind the evil may be remedied by his own personal effort and redoubled exertions in after life, when truth will claim her own, and a reality of thought and feel-

ing and action spring up from the rubbish under which it has been buried.

Thus far I have alluded to what appear to me some of the evils to be avoided in our intercourse with children, but if you will exercise your patience a little longer I should like to express what seem to me some of the sins of omission in their education. It surely is unnecessary for me to say, while endeavoring to point out some of its defects, that I am aware that there are mothers who in this department go far beyond any theory of those who have not themselves gone through the purifying influence of their daily practice ; but such mothers will, in their sympathy with the feeling and interest that the cause itself excites, readily forgive any expressions or views which may appear too warm or unguarded.

LETTER VI.

There is one subject that appears to me almost entirely neglected in education, one upon which children are left to form whatever notions may happen to interest them in the conversation to which they are listeners, or in what they witness in the daily intercourse of life, and this is, *money*, that 'root of all evil,' and of so much good. Let any one ask himself if he has not felt either from his own experience or that of others the evils to which it may lead. If there is any being so fortunate as to have escaped this source of suffering, he should not be insensible to the blessing; but I believe there is scarcely an individual who has not suffered through this channel; and if this is the case the subject is certainly one of importance, and its evils might perhaps be lessened by giving to children those views which will be the most likely to prevent such a tendency.

The dollars and cents are certainly innocent in themselves and may be made useful servants

to conscientious masters. But there seems an unaccountable feeling of awe and respect excited when dealing upon this subject, a sort of superstition that money has in itself a charm independent of its uses.

The child for instance who is born to a great property is considered by his parents and friends as standing aloof, shut out from common sympathies and common temptations, while he is reserved to meet this many-headed monster that lies concealed in the bottom of his purse ready to seize upon him the moment he is allowed to untie the strings. What will become of him? is the anxious question, and he is associated in the thoughts of those who are interested in him with a concern and depth of feeling that would appear ridiculous did we not know from experience that there is sufficient ground for this fear. But can this be necessary? is it not an evil of our own coining?

As money is indispensable to our comfort and enjoyment it is natural we should lay great stress upon it, and perhaps natural that we should associate with it much that does not belong to it. But in doing this we prevent its right use and give it an undue place in our

thoughts and affections. We are not satisfied with its power of buying food and clothing and luxuries and relief, but for the sake of its possession, we give up peace of mind, and make ourselves bankrupts in happiness to fill our purses with what can never buy one moment's ease of heart, or cover the slightest fault.

Is it not true that we attach to it a superstitious value even when we despise the worship that the miser pays it, and if so, are we not perpetuating unconsciously such a feeling in our children? But allow this to be an extravagant view and not generally applicable, are children led to consider the spending of money as a conscientious act, and one which has the same charms and no more than any other conscientious act—that we are as much called upon to think of our duty and what we owe to others when we happen to be the instruments for the use of this means of good as for any other? A child who is taught so to consider money, would it appears to me stand as good a chance as other children to turn out a respectable, self-respecting character, one whose mind might be cultivated even though he should not be obliged to do it for the pecuniary aid it would bring

him. His mind, without which his money is as nothing, need not rust out and become void because he has not this good to seek for; there are surely other objects which may be made as attractive, may excite as deep an interest, as great vigilance and faithfulness; the same powers might as easily be turned into other channels having as alluring an aspect as though they were gilded with the precious metal.

If children who are to look forward to a large property were made early to use a portion of it for its best purposes, there would not be the danger of their attaching to it any false value; they would learn to love their money for the good it might do, and not for the number of figures requisite to tell its amount. They would associate with it relief to the sick and the poor, gratification to their taste and thirst of knowledge, and see in it the power to raise from obscurity the gifted mind struggling with want, and consider their money as a blessing only in proportion as it promoted these ends. It does not seem to be a common thing for rich parents to let the children who are sharers of their property form any habits upon the uses of money, while they are scrupulous to give them habits

upon other subjects of not half the consequence. They think it necessary to keep out of sight that their children will one day have more money than they will know what to do with. This is the very evil—why should they not know what to do with it at any age, why should they not know it is a means for the use of which they will be accountable, why should not their generous sympathies be gratified at all times in acts of love and kindness, and why such a mystery attached to this means of gratifying these feelings, of sounding their depth and letting them realize the joys of doing good?

It may be said, if such are a child's habits what is to be expected in case of a reverse when these means may be withdrawn? I would ask if any one is the less prepared for poverty because he can look back upon the time when his bounty relieved the suffering and encouraged the industrious poor? Will they enjoy the less their frugal meal because they can remember the time when they have fed the hungry and caused their names to be blessed wherever poverty and want have been endured? Can there after all be a better preparation to meet the calls for self-denial when poverty assails us?

It seems to me that in order to help children to a right notion of money, we should let them in their own persons experience its worth, give them a portion of the means which may become a source to them of much good or evil, and let them see that it has in it no power but what they invest it with. The pocket money which they have at their own disposal will teach them more wisdom upon the subject than many lectures. You often hear it said that if children have pocket money they will only spend it for sugar plums and cake or foolish toys ; I would ask if the propensity to spend money in this manner be imparted to the child through the money itself ! If so, there is certainly sufficient ground for the feeling toward it, to which I have alluded. The mere act of spending money should not be considered as one of so much importance ; it is this that leads children to attach to it a factitious value, and which tenaciously holds to them in after life. Suppose a child when he first has his pocket money to be so pleased with its possession and the power it gives him that he buys the first thing he sees, and perhaps spends all his money in what we should call a foolish manner ; when he is

without it he may meet with something that he wishes much more to possess than anything he has yet bought. This leads him to the knowledge that his money is valuable to him only in proportion to the mode in which he expends it; he soon finds out that what he gave for sugar-plums which were soon consumed might have purchased something that would have given him more lasting pleasure; and if he has been so educated as to enjoy higher pleasures than eating and drinking it will not be long before he will use his money for these pleasures.

It is no doubt natural for a child to spend his money for his selfish pleasures, but we should remember that the evil is not in the money, and that we may make this a means of teaching him in a practical way that to minister to others' wants and pleasures is a way of ministering to our own happiness. I would not tell a child when giving him money that he was to spend it for others; for then he would not feel as if it were his own; but I would lead him to think of the good it might do, and put him in situations where he would be reminded of its power to serve others; and then let his mind act freely, and I believe that a child would most always

take the generous part. If he took the selfish one, the case might be presented to him in such a way as to lead him to doubt at least whether he had bought as much pleasure with his money as it was capable of giving him ; one such honest doubt would be better for him than all the advice or restrictions you could give him. It appears to me that for children who are the inheritors of property the lessons they learn in this way are an indispensable means of giving them right notions. They should learn by experience in how short a time a great sum of money may be expended for trifling and unsatisfactory enjoyments : and how far, very far, a small sum may go when the head and the heart combine to make it serve a good purpose. But if a child is not born to a large inheritance he is born where money is expended and where he may learn its true value, which is quite as important information as much that he is instructed in as indispensable. A means of so much good and evil should not be considered as too insignificant to be ranked amongst the subjects upon which we should give right notions to our children. Some parents are afraid to dwell upon it lest their chil-

dren should think it of too much importance and become avaricious. They think it unnecessary for them to know anything upon a subject they have nothing to do with ;—but should they not have something to do with it ? They are perhaps every day attaching to it some feeling or idea that is imperceptibly giving a bias to their future views and future conduct in relation to it ; and as no parent can be sure how his child may in future stand in regard to it, he should fit him for any situation.

If he is rich he should learn to spend his money more for lasting good than for personal shortlived gratification, so that if he become poor he may find himself rich ; if he is poor he should learn so to value his little that should he become rich, he may feel a willingness and a desire to impart what he has learnt in his poverty how to truly estimate.

It appears to me if there is any difference in the education of children who are to inherit great fortunes and those who are to look only to a moderate one, it should only be that the child of the rich parent should be more thoroughly educated, because circumstances in all probability will not be so favorable to the de-

velopment of his character. The child of rich parents is often shut out from many advantages and much real and useful happiness from the idea that this golden idol is reserved when he comes of age to shower down upon him all blessings without his taking the trouble to seek them. If he has made little progress in his learning, and is hardly conscious that he has a mind, it matters little ; there is that in store for him which will bring all things to his feet. This is the way the child thinks and acts ; and let parents ask how much they have done to prevent so fatal a view. They should continually bear in mind that their child who is born to a fortune is cut off from the advantages of one of the best teachers,—stern necessity, and though a hard master, one that often proves our best friend by acquainting us with the treasures we have within, inexhaustible in proportion to the demands made upon them. Parents should then be doubly vigilant to make up this deficiency ; then they need not fear that any fortune can be found large enough to weigh down the happiness and character of the child it should benefit.

LETTER VII.

Another subject upon which I think children are neglected in their education is that of taste; not that taste can be taught to a child like his geography or arithmetic, nor do I allude to it from the idea that I can present the subject in a light at all worthy of it, but I speak of it from the same reason I have spoken of other topics—from a deep interest in whatever may be enlisted in the great cause of education; I only wish now to ask the question whether a child's mind may not be called forth upon this subject, and induced to draw from it as a source of happiness and improvement? and if so, are we fulfilling our duty toward our children by neglecting its culture?

The great difference there is in children upon this point has led parents to think it best to let nature follow her own course, and not interfere when she seems to have taken the work out of their hands into her own. But are we not apt to think because the indications of taste are so strong in some children, that others are with-

out it altogether who do not show some decided mark of its existence? It is however but seldom that we meet with such instances, and why should we not suppose that this quality of the mind, like all others, may exist in different degrees in different individuals? we are often tempted to overlook those gifts which do not strike our shortsighted view as intended for some purpose which we call useful, and therefore when the tastes of our children are not so decided as to indicate some object to be attained by them which shall promote their temporal good we think it right to neglect them altogether. On this ground a mother conscientiously avoids expending time or thought upon the cultivation of the tastes of her children, unless as I said before, she perceives how they can be turned to some known advantage. But is it not peculiarly important that we should cordially recognise and faithfully adhere to whatever connects us with the invisible world? It seems to me that we should hail with joy the smallest gleam of light that comes from the region to which we are bound and steer our course in its direction. A child whose mind is led to perceive and take pleasure in the beautiful has taken one lesson in its own immortality. Every flower

that it notices does something toward acquainting it with its connexion with Him who caused the flower to spring up. From such evidences so abundantly spread around it, the child may be led to feel the pleadings of silent eloquence in the cause of Him who made us to love the beautiful in his visible and invisible world.

By neglecting to cultivate in children the capacity to discover what is harmonious and beautiful we omit a means of keeping them in view of some of the sources of their purest enjoyment. In leading children to the perception and enjoyment of the beautiful we certainly do something toward tuning their hearts to His voice who speaks to his children in every star and in every flower, who tells them of his greatness from the mountain top and in the roar of the wide ocean. On this ground it appears to me we should consider it a duty to cultivate in children the love of the beautiful, and for this end a part of their education should be in the country, where nature herself is ever presenting to them the fairest specimens of form and color and motion, and inviting them to observe her ever varying beauties. A child who is naturally unobserving may here be awakened,

and instructed in lessons it will never forget. Should it be the case that children are so situated that they cannot enjoy the privilege of such instruction, let their homes, wherever they may be, show some indications that these sources of enjoyment exist. If they are doomed to live in a crowded city through summer and winter with nothing but perpendicular walls for their prospect, let the room to which they most frequently resort be hung with good pictures that shall awaken their imaginations and carry them beyond its limits. Let the miniature flower-bed which is confined within the limits of a candle-box or a half-barrel, tell them something of the beautiful growth of plants. For the seed if sown in good ground will even here spring up to gladden their little hearts with its graceful form and beautiful colors, and tell as true a story of its Author as if it had grown up in a more favored spot. A child's nursery should as far as possible be the abode of taste ; whatever children possess either in dress or playthings taste should be consulted, and this may be done at a trifling expense.

In dealing with children we are very apt to forget that their minds possess as truly the ele-

ments of their whole future developement as their bodies. We do not think because they are so much below us in stature that they can do without sleep or food or rest any more than ourselves, but we find they require much the same as we do, and that all their bodily wants must be supplied, or they will suffer, though they cannot always tell as plainly as we can how much or in what manner they suffer ; and so it is with their minds. We have no right to neglect any of their unseen demands. By not acknowledging and answering these spiritual wants we virtually deny their existence, and thus begin to instruct them in a sort of infidelity. Is this not as true a neglect as it would be to keep from them their daily food? It appears to me that everything which bears any relation to our spiritual existence should be held as a sacred pledge to remind us that while children on the earth, the country to which we are bound is the home of our spirits.

LETTER VIII.

The anxiety you feel upon the subject of religion as connected with the education of your son, I fully sympathise with, and should be most truly grateful could I present to you any views that might assist your efforts in this object and end of all education. A sincere desire to promote this highest good may become however a means of doing something toward it, and on this ground I am willing to present to you any views that strike my mind in relation to it, while feeling unequal to answer your question, ‘what is the best method of imparting religious knowledge to children?’ This question can I believe be best answered in the different experiences of those who have made the attempt; but it is one that will ever be asked with anxiety and never satisfactorily answered, till greater progress has been made in the religious life of those who are placed as guides over the young.

The mode of giving religious instruction

must it appears to me vary with every child; experience teaches that there has been no approved method discovered by which a child must inevitably learn to be religious. This great lesson of life which is learnt but once differs with every human being, though the end to be gained is one and the same with all.

But to become effective instructors we must have thoroughly learned ourselves, and the difficulty of giving instruction oftener lies here than we are aware of.

We must first school ourselves and endeavor to recollect our own deficiencies before we approach the subject in relation to children. We must make an effort to break through the barriers of habit and education, and return to the true source, and in the simplicity of children ask what it is we are to impart to them, and learn from him who took little children in his arms, how we are to lead them in his steps.

Is it not true that there is a vagueness in our own minds upon the subject, a mysterious impression, an indefinite something we connect with the word religion, that takes from us the capacity of giving simple and clear ideas of it to children; and are we not often so over-

whelmed with its magnitude and importance, and so desirous to give some worthy notion of it to our children, as to overlook the means by which such an end is to be gained? In our aspiring views we forget that the ladder which reaches to heaven is fixed on the earth, and that the lowest steps must first be taken before we can reach the summit.

In teaching a child religion it appears to me we should follow something of the method we pursue in assisting them to talk, and remember that it is their native language which they will learn in the purity in which they hear it spoken. We do not sit down and say how we will teach our children to speak, and ask when and where it is best to begin, and return to our grammars to give them a regular course of instruction for acquiring a language; but we let them pronounce any word that seems the best adapted to their organs, and remember that if they can pronounce one word, they will in time be able to pronounce more, and our perfect faith that such will be the result prevents an unwise haste on our part which would retard rather than advance the child in its efforts. We instinctively leave them to choose for themselves the sounds

upon which they will practise and gain strength for greater efforts. If our religion was the daily and hourly accompaniment of our thoughts and desires, the language of our hearts---should we not find a way of teaching it to our children as simple and direct as the unthought of method we pursue in teaching them to talk? A mother does not take pains to recall what were the words her first child said in order to assist her second one in his attempts for the same end; she knows that his hearing is perfect; and feels no solicitude that he will not catch in some order the sounds that are continually meeting his ears.

I do not mean to say by this that a child will as infallibly learn the religion of his parents as he does their language; for experience teaches the contrary, and a strong reason against it, is, that children are not apt to learn what they do not comprehend. There is so much that is contradictory in what they witness upon the subject of religion, such a want of truth, that they are not interested. The questions they so often ask of 'what for?' and 'why is it?' which they love to have answered on other subjects, gain to them little satisfaction on this, either in what they

see or hear. A child will learn what he understands, and be more likely to acquire the language in which the every-day concerns of life are expressed by his parents, than a foreign one in which they may read and instruct, even if he heard the latter oftener than the former.

I am aware that the illustration I have used does not hold good in all cases, nor do I recommend that nothing more should be done for a child's religious instruction than there is for teaching him to talk. But the ground I have taken seems to me a safe one, one upon which we may stand with hope and trust that the divine favor will aid us in our efforts to place our children in the way to gain their heavenly inheritance.

It may be said, if this view is correct why do we sometimes see children who have never been under good influences often prove to bear a more religious character than those who possess the advantage of religious instruction and religious parents. That there are such instances seems to me only to prove what is the nature of the mind; that it can through all obstacles seek and find its native home, its true father, and claim divine assistance. Such instances it appears to me should not shake our faith in the

good that may be done by our efforts, but lead us when we fail to question whether they have been wisely exerted, and to ask ourselves if we have not often been influenced by a blind zeal rather than a careful examination of our labors with a willingness to see and correct our mistakes.

Those who doubt the truth of the ground I have taken may bring forward the children of clergymen as an instance that little is done by example. This argument has no weight unless it be proved that the domestic life in a clergyman's house reaches the standard which he holds out in the pulpit. This does not necessarily follow. It must be remembered that the altar to which the children daily come is in the home of their mother's heart ; and if this is not right, how are they benefited by the fact that they have a minister for their father. Experience shows that clergymen's wives are no better than physicians' or merchants' wives ; neither has it been proved that clergymen are necessarily better men and better fathers than other men. They themselves will tell you that the religion they preach may have equal power in any station ; and that the outward

forms which they habitually observe at home do not necessarily insure those results that come only from the true worship in the inward temple of the heart. I think I could prove why the life of a clergyman is no security that his example at home should be one that would attract his children and interest them in the subject of religion ; and I do not feel from this fact at all shaken in the ground which I have assumed.

It may be thought a discouraging view, that a mother who has a family of children to direct and guide to their true happiness should herself be ignorant of the way, and be obliged to learn first the lessons she is going to teach. What is there discouraging in this? Are we not always learning, and does it make any difference what we are learning provided the great good is attained by it? With what cheerfulness do parents turn to their French syntax to refresh their minds sufficiently to impart some knowledge of it to their children ; how they love to plod over the ground when they know that by so doing they shall make it clearer to their children—and should they not with

more earnestness, more zeal, more faithfulness search their own hearts and see what they can gather there to impart to their children ; and if they find little that is likely to be understood by their pure and simple minds can they do anything better than take their fan in their hands and thoroughly purge the floor and give to their children the nourishing wheat while they burn up the chaff? Will this impede their progress when they stop on their way for such a purpose? Will it not on the contrary give them more distinct views of the narrow way which so few find, because it is so unobtrusive?

Some parents are disturbed because they cannot give to their children any correct notions of the Deity, and are often shocked at the questions they ask and the remarks they make. I see no sufficient cause for this anxiety. Why should a parent be disturbed because the sublimest conception of which the human mind is capable cannot be conveyed to a child before he is conscious that he himself possesses a mind? Suppose that any one should succeed in giving some adequate notion of the Deity to a child, how is he to make use of this knowledge, how is it to benefit him till he has learnt

through his own experience in some measure to appreciate it? It appears to me we should do the child much more good by telling him of some of the attributes of the Deity as coming under his daily notice, though in but a faint light. Let him see and feel what is justice, benevolence, truth, and love, let him learn to be moved by them first, and then we can take him a step farther, and so on till his mind shall naturally be raised to the source whence all he has learnt to love proceeds. He must first learn that he has a mind himself, that there is a part of him that thinks, and loves, and knows, which neither he nor any one has seen, before he can form any true idea of his invisible Father ; and before he is told to love this invisible Being whom he has not seen, he must learn what it is to love his brother whom he has seen. I do not agree with some people that religious instruction should be left till a child is sufficiently advanced to gain perfectly correct notions upon the subject. I think it highly important that some idea of our connexion with an invisible power should be early received into their minds, that they should feel 'there is a power that none of us can see.' But I would not be anxious to give

this idea a doctrinal form. I would take pains to put children in situations where they would be likely to feel that an invisible hand had been employed. I would show them the starry heavens and let them catch by sympathy the awe and delight with which they inspired my own breast, and wait for them to ask something of their story, before I undertook to give them any explanation which might interrupt their reveries that were perhaps carrying them far beyond any ideas I could give them.

When I say a child should not be *taught* religion, but be so educated as to *become* religious, it expresses what I mean. In the one case we are ignorant of what is their own, of how much has reached the heart ; in the other case what they do possess has grown with their growth and is rooted in the heart whence it first sprung, where it will endure to the end and spring up into everlasting life.



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